

Introduction to the Academic Roundtable: Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*

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“Women hold up half the sky.” – Chinese Proverb

The topic of discussion for this Academic Roundtable is Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's 2009 work of what is perhaps best described as “advocacy journalism:” *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. In this work, Kristof (currently an op-ed columnist for the *New York Times*) and WuDunn (a former foreign affairs correspondent for the *New York Times* and currently an investment advisor with a focus on philanthropy) leverage their cultural authority to the “incipient movement to emancipate women and fight global poverty by unlocking women's power as economic catalysts” (Kristof and WuDunn 2009, xxii). The book is only one part of their efforts, which also include a website (www.halftheskymovement.org) that contains additional success stories, links to groups that support women in developing countries, and an active forum for information sharing.

The four participants in the roundtable – Christina Morus (The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey), Sally Scholz (Villanova University), Maurice Hamington (Metropolitan State College of Denver), and Amy Ross (University of Georgia) – have at least two things in common. First, they share with each other, and with Kristof and WuDunn, a commitment to improving the lives of women and girls worldwide. But, second, they are each *not* a part of the target audience of Kristof and WuDunn's book. As Scholz notes in her contribution, the authors are writing for an audience for whom these issues are *new*, and who thus need to be both informed about the violence, oppression, demoralization and degradation that many women and girls face daily and encouraged to make some first step, however small, towards solving these problems (Scholz 2011, x-x). For the participants, there is nothing “incipient” about this movement; it has been going on for centuries and they each have been working at it for years both inside and outside of the academy. Nonetheless, the participants do not dismiss Kristof and WuDunn's work. Rather, by discussing Kristof and WuDunn's book in relation to their own expertise and experience – in relation to the rhetoric of persuasion in an individualistic culture (Morus), to the need for solidarities and an awareness of the achievements of feminism (Scholz), to the nature of an ethics of care (Hamington), and to a critique of humanitarianism in an age of neo-liberalism (Ross) – they each in effect *expand* the potential audience and the range of useful and needed actions in the worldwide movement to turn oppression into opportunity for women.

Works Cited

Kristof, Nicholas D. and Sheryl WuDunn. 2009. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.